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Witnesses Claim That CIA Wanted Rewald Murdered

In this conclusion of a two-part series, author Tom Valentine delves deeper into the CIA connection with erstwhile financier Ronald Rewald. Last week, Valentine examined the charges against Rewald and the financier's claim that he was simply a "tool of the CIA."

Well-known attorney Melvin Belli has been hired by some of the investors who fear their money will never be returned. And Assistant U.S. Attorney John F. Peyton Jr. is prosecuting the fraud case as though the CIA didn't exist.

But as we learn this week, a California ex-policeman supports Rewald's story.

EXCLUSIVE TO THE SPOTLIGHT
By Tom Valentine

The biggest thorns in the CIA cover-up of the agency's role in the collapse of the Ronald Rewald investment empire may prove to be Scott Barnes (an ex-policeman from California) and "Pete P." Pohlable (a 30-year veteran of covert CIA operations).

Both men have admitted to being "offered a lot of money" to terminate Rewald. The CIA acknowledges nothing in this regard.

Pohlable, 61, has requested political asylum in Canada and has apparently agreed to talk with some writers and perhaps investors concerning his role as a potential Rewald assassin, paid for by the CIA.

Although unable to reach Pohlable, The SPOTLIGHT interviewed Barnes. Barnes has since granted the investors and attorney Melvin Belli a complete deposition, under oath, concerning his attempt to assassinate Rewald while the latter was in the Oahu State Prison in Hawaii in the summer of 1983, before the lid blew on the case.

"I used the name of 'Reverend Barnes' and wrote letters back and forth to Rewald," Barnes told The SPOTLIGHT. "Those guys know the whole story."

The "whole story" is that Barnes ac-

cepted an assignment as an "agent handler" in which he knew nothing about the facts behind the potential victim: Rewald.

"Now that I know what the whole thing was all about," Barnes told one of the investors, "I'm on your side. The whole thing is wrong."

Barnes said he is a born-again Christian and disavows his actions.

According to one investor, "Barnes at first tried to learn about Rewald's personal and medical history to see if a drug overdose could be arranged—that's why he contacted Rewald as 'Reverend Barnes'."

Rewald, who knew nothing of the assassination attempts until recently, told The SPOTLIGHT, "Now it makes sense to me why the 'Reverend Barnes' tried so hard to have me send out for him so that he could visit me personally."

"The second part of the plan," the investor added, "was to cause a race riot and pay one of the Samoan killers to 'shank' Rewald—that is, stab him with a homemade weapon."

Barnes explained it this way: "The con would never be charged with the murder. It would have been a routine shank in a race fight. Using a shank means you don't have to smuggle a weapon into the prison—avoids conspiracy raps, you know."

However, all this juicy testimony, including the Pohlable flight to asylum, is not "open and shut" as they say in detective books. Barnes may be considered a totally unreliable witness, and if that isn't enough, the CIA "disinformation program" is busy spreading the word that the People's Republic of (Red) China were the operatives behind the Rewald assassination contracts.

Rewald, it has been learned earlier (SPOTLIGHT, May 28), played a key role in selling arms to Taiwan—a "CDO" ("clandestine operation" in CIA jargon).

CHECKERED PAST

As if the plot is still too thin, a check of Barnes's checkered past adds weight to both his credibility and unreliability.

Evidently Barnes went to Saigon in 1973 in some civilian capacity and

wound up "recruited" by contract agents who dealt with CIA and other covert happenings.

"He's a strange and enchanting guy," one investor said. "He seems to have contacts everywhere, and at the highest levels."

Around 1978 Barnes became a police officer in the city of El Cajon near San Diego. He then moved on to the Ridgecrest, California Police Department. His tenure with the two law enforcement departments was short, swift and evidently sensational.

"The man is not considered reliable," said a spokesman for the San Diego County Sheriff's Department.

FIXATION

While serving as a police officer, Barnes had an apparent "fixation" against the Hell's Angels motorcycle gang and often assaulted them dangerously and recklessly.

"Then when we had Sonny Barger up on charges," the sheriff's spokesman said, "this guy Barnes becomes a witness for him."

Barger is the longtime leader of California's Hell's Angels and a convicted felon.

"I infiltrated the Hell's Angels that way," Barnes said with apparent relish.

Officials in El Cajon cannot comment on any of Barnes's activity because of a "court-ordered silence" concerning his file.

"The CIA must have done that," Barnes responded when told of the court-ordered secrecy. "I didn't know anything about it until now."

Officers in Ridgecrest referred to him as a "cowboy"—a wild and woolly con who seemed utterly fearless in the face of danger.

Barnes gained a measure of fame in 1981-82 when he associated with Bo Gritz of Laos-prisoner of war fame. Barnes was featured in articles by Kevin Cody in "Easy Rider," (April, 1982) and the "Covert Action Information Bulletin," (summer, 1982) alleging that he was hired to kill any POWs found in Laos.

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Barnes has since written film scripts revolving around both the Laos operations with Bo Gritz and his infiltration of the Hell's Angels.

While critics will be quick to say that Barnes's desire to make films of his adventures lessens his credibility, others point out—"He did it."

During communications with the investors, who hope to force the CIA into settlement, Barnes asked: "Is John Peyton working over there [Hawaii]?"

Peyton is the prosecutor in the Rewald case, so the response was, "yes."

"Tell him 'hello' for me," Barnes quipped. "The last time we worked together on a covert action was on a Florida narcotics job."

Barnes seems to devastate everything, wherever he goes.

Attorneys for Rewald and the investors were tipped off to the Barnes assassination attempt by a telephone call from Washington. They immediately took action and the authorities reacted to the tip properly. However, Barnes was forewarned in typical James Bond fashion and managed to escape the islands to turn up as a witness for the investors.

Barnes seems to have inside information, which adds to his credibility. "The CIA was trying to settle, quietly, with the investors and let this thing blow over," he told The SPOTLIGHT, "but the attorneys on the island kept squabbling. Even though progress had been made, the haggle finally made the CIA change its tune."

And as the sun sets on the beautiful islands of Hawaii accompanied by the exotic twangs of steel guitars, American citizens continue plodding through life not knowing what evil lurks in the CIA. ●